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The Distinct Dispossessions of Indian Settler Colonialism in Kashmir: Land, Narrative and Indigeneity

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ABSTRACT

India's annexation of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 has generated debates within Critical Kashmir Studies regarding the kind of settler colonialism that is operating in this disputed Himalayan region. To illuminate the current relationship between land dispossession and narratives that legitimize land grab (for the settlement of Hindu Indian settlers), this article traces the logics and genesis of this ongoing settler project in Kashmir, going back to the historic Dogra feudal rule. The authors argue that the Hindu Dogra dispensation installed a revenue surveillance system that enabled it to engage in institutionalized land grab, and show how that extractive land administrative structure has been repurposed by the Indian state for its settler project. The article demonstrates how the Indian state engages in the (epistemic/discursive) erasure of local voices to ensure that the Kashmiri (Muslim) native is stripped of the position of indigeneity both over land and over the narrative of an expropriatory land grab. It further illustrates how the state strives to create facts on the ground to (re)define the 'native' and (re)claim the land for Indian Hindu settlers.

INTRODUCTION

On 5 August 2019, the Indian state forcefully revoked Kashmir's[1] semi-autonomous status by de-operationalizing Article 370 of the Indian constitution through a Presidential Order.[2] The removal of Article 370 had

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1. We use the shorthand term 'Kashmir' for the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The context of the article specifically focuses on the Kashmir Valley region as the site of intense state surveillance.
2. See Zia et al. (2020) for an excellent description of the undemocratic manner (e.g., the blanket communication lockdown and mass arrests of political and civil society activists) in

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long been an election promise of India's current Hindutva government — a regime that explicitly espouses a Hindu supremacist agenda towards Indian minorities and seeks full integration of the contested Kashmir region into what it calls *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India).[3] The Hindutva agenda of the Indian government demonizes Kashmiri Muslims as traitors for claiming their right to self-determination (Zia, 2020). However, it must be noted here that the military occupation and colonization of Kashmir since 1947 were implemented under a secular Indian leadership. Kashmir's autonomous status had thus already been eroded through a process of 'occupational constitutionalism' or occupation enabled by the Indian constitution in the context of an Indian secular ethos (Duschinski and Ghosh, 2017). The removal of Article 370 can be seen as the annexation of Kashmir to the Indian state — the removal of the fig leaf of autonomy.

The de-operationalization of Article 370 also rendered Article 35A of the Indian constitution, which guaranteed Kashmiris exclusive right to own land based on Kashmir's autonomous status, inoperable. With India's Hindu right-wing government announcing the full integration of Kashmir into the Indian Union, Hafsa Kanjwal argued in the *Washington Post* that the 'unconstitutional move' marked a turn in India's 'settler colonial project in Kashmir, one akin to Israel's in Palestine' (Kanjwal, 2019). Land rights, Kanjwal emphasized, were 'the last thing that Kashmiris were holding onto to preserve some semblance of their nationhood' (ibid.). Centring Kashmiri perspectives to focus the debate on Indian-administered Kashmir as one of the world's longest-running bilateral 'territorial disputes' between India and Pakistan, Critical Kashmir Scholars had been theorizing India's relationship to Kashmir as one of occupation and a form of (post-)colonialism (Bhan et al., 2018; Junaid, 2013; Osuri, 2017). Since August 2019, scholars have turned to the settler colonial analytic to explain the Indian state's colonial techniques in Kashmir (Bhan et al., 2022; Kanji, 2021; Mushtaq and Amin, 2021; Veracini, 2022). This perspective aligns with the views expressed by locals and pro-resistance political groups such as Hurriyat,[4] who have repeatedly argued that India has been seeking to engineer a demographic change as a means of eliminating dissent (Hussain, 2010; Nawaz, 2017).

To contribute to these ongoing scholarly discussions regarding the operations of settler colonialism in Kashmir, we mark our positionalities as

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which the annexation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir was executed on 5 August 2019. See also Bhasin (2023)

3. *Akhand Bharat* is intended to incorporate lands that constituted the 3rd century BC empire of Chandragupta Maurya. Akhand Bharat, as envisioned by Hindutva nationalists, encompasses not just Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Tibet. The merged territory is referred to as a *Rashtra* because of its 'Hindu cultural' commonalities (Mishra, 2022: 530).
4. For instance, in 2009, Hurriyat leader S.A.S. Geelani accused the Indian government of changing the demography of Jammu and Kashmir following the pattern of Israel's settler colonialism (*The Indian Express*, 2009).

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a Kashmiri scholar and an Indian scholar collaborating on this article. We pay specific attention to the historical and ongoing dispossession of land (a key feature of settler colonial activity) and the media narratives that create Indian state discourse regarding this activity, and illustrate how Hinduness as the basis of an 'Indian' indigeneity in Kashmir is legitimized through its settler colonialism. We argue that surveillance, a mechanism which facilitated land revenue as part of Kashmir's historical dispossession and has continued as a technique of India's occupation of Kashmir, facilitates the current settler colonial land dispossession. Accompanying this land dispossession is the Indian state's attempt to erase any Kashmiri narratives, especially media narratives, which highlight India's settler colonial land dispossession in Kashmir.

To fulfil the aim of mapping the ongoing settler colonialism in Kashmir, we will first review scholarly use of settler colonialism as a framework to describe India's relationship to Kashmir. We will then turn to the history of the use of surveillance for land administration — a history which highlights the installation of Hinduized relations of power. This historical system of land surveillance continued even as Kashmir witnessed 'land-to-tiller' agrarian reforms in the 1950s. The Indian government is now facilitating a large-scale settler colonial land dispossession through this surveillance system, overturning the land-to-tiller reforms in order to displace a largely Kashmiri Muslim population with a Hindu Indian settler population. Accompanying this sweeping transformation, the Indian government is engaged in silencing Kashmiri narratives of their dispossession and creating a settler colonial narrative of a Hindu Indian 'reclamation' of land in Kashmir.

The essay draws on research produced by Haris Zargar's fieldwork, conducted between May 2021 and September 2022, as well as on semi-structured interviews with Kashmiri journalists carried out by both authors in the summer of 2022. Zargar's wider fieldwork included informal discussions, semi-structured interviews, archival research of state policy documents and associated secondary data and historical reports on land legislation. Interviews were conducted with various Kashmiri stakeholders including cultivators, smallholding farmers, agri-trade union leaders, state agriculture and revenue officers, local agri-economists, land rights activists and journalists.

SETTLER COLONIALISM IN KASHMIR

Patrick Wolfe's classic theorization of settler colonialism represented an attempt to distinguish settler colonialism as a distinct form of colonialism, one that focused on land dispossession and the elimination of the native (Wolfe, 2006: 388, 395). More recently, Sai Englert (2020), Sharon Speed (2017) and Robin Kelley (2017) have argued that a rigid distinction between what Wolfe (2001) called 'franchise colonialism' and 'settler colonialism'

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may not be helpful in thinking through the materiality of contexts of settler colonialism. For Wolfe, 'franchise colonialism' refers to colonization in which surplus value is extracted by combining the labour of natives with resources of the colony (2001: 868). In contrast, Wolfe (2006) posits that settler colonialism is concerned with dispossession of land and the eliminative of the native. In a critique of this distinction, Englert (2020) puts forward the thesis that generalizing a pure theoretical model of settler colonialism may be untenable when settler colonial activity produces social relations based on material context. Indigenous critiques of a pure theoretical model of settler colonialism offer a way forward as they argue that any settler colonial analytic must be situated in indigenous scholarship regarding histories and current struggles against settler colonialism (Barakat, 2018; Carey and Silverstein, 2020; Kauanui, 2016).

With a focus on the historical and material context of Kashmir, Critical Kashmir Studies scholars have discussed the applicability of the settler colonial analytic in Kashmir (Bhan et al., 2022: 9). Samreen Mushtaq and Mudasir Amin's use of the settler colonial analytic is an early instance of the argument that settler colonial logics need to be understood through a longer history of the context of military occupation and its intersection with settler colonialism (Mushtaq and Amin, 2021: 3013). Challenging the binary between colonialism and settler colonialism for the context of Kashmir — a challenge that makes sense given the prior mapping of intersections of occupation and colonialism within Critical Kashmir Studies — Mushtaq and Amin have usefully identified some of the logics of settler colonialism in Kashmir. Going back to 1947 rather than August 2019, these include the Indian state's concern with control over territory, demography and ecology (ibid.: 3013). For example, Mushtaq and Amin cite demographic change, tacitly supported by the Indian state through the massacre of Muslims in Jammu in 1947, as an example of a settler colonial logic.[5] Alongside the focus on territory, demography and ecology, Mushtaq and Amin also emphasize 'memoricide[6] in the way that the war on history, memory and narratives induces erasures to eliminate people's sense of belongingness' (ibid.: 3016). This analysis echoes the understanding that settler colonialism operates predominantly by obscuring the conditions of colonial situations (Kawatra, 2017). Interestingly, Mushtaq and Amin identify settler colonial logics rather than a full-blown form of settler colonial dispossession, indicating that while the Indian state attempted elements of settler colonialism, it was unable to engage in a formalized process of settler dispossession until August 2019.

5. See Rashid (2020) for an account of this logic. See also Kanji (2021) for evidence of settler colonial logic through the Indian army's occupation of land in Kashmir.
6. 'Memoricide' denotes a deliberate act of obliterating the memories and cultural treasures of an adversary, embodying the intentional destruction of their historical legacy (Civallero, 2007, cited in Fuller and Owen, 2022: 529).

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Similarly, Kanji (2021) identifies a longer history of India's settler colonial 'desire' for Kashmir. Drawing on scholarship that has discussed this desire for Kashmir's territory through descriptions of its beauty and the emphasis on its Hindu heritage as ancient past, Kanji argues that an 'ahistorical vision of Kashmiri society without Kashmir Muslims' is the basis for the Indian state's 'elimination of aspects of Kashmiri identity that challenge its settler colonial narrative' (Kanji, 2021: 2539). This settler colonial desire manifested itself in the Indian army's occupation of land in Kashmir prior to 2019. Both Mushtaq and Amin (2021) and Kanji (2021) suggest that India governed an 'autonomous' Kashmir through settler colonial desire and logics, enacting certain techniques identifiable as settler colonialism. Yet, it is important to note that Indian settler colonialism in Kashmir is now characterized by a full-scale settler colonialism enabled by the loss of Kashmir's nominal autonomy and exclusive Kashmiri ownership of land and resident status, coupled with neoliberal agrarian reform.

Veracini (2022) argues for a differentiation in analyses of settler colonialisms. Kashmir, Veracini argues, is an example of 'colonialism with settlers' as opposed to 19th century Anglophone settler colonialisms in which collectives of settlers demanded autonomy from their home countries in order to establish a 'separate and sovereign homeland'. Colonialism with settlers, Veracini suggests, is exemplified by the removal of Article 370 and Article 35A (which protected domicile rights and ownership of land for indigenous Kashmiris), thereby facilitating the transfer of Indian settlers into Kashmir — a process of indigenization of Indians, particularly Hindu Indians, as Kashmiris. Or, as Veracini (ibid.) puts it, 'the settler collective aims to turn itself into a "native" polity'. As Veracini rightly argues, Indian settler colonialism takes the form of indigenizing Hinduness and presenting Kashmiri Muslims as 'exogenous', as a collective that cannot claim indigeneity in Kashmir. In this contestation over indigeneity, Hindu Indian settlers are presented as returning to land and returning to 'authentic roots', rather than founding a new homeland (ibid.). It is this process that we identify and explore as a distinct form of Indian Hindu settler colonialism, one which claims indigeneity by eliminating the native through demographic change, accompanied by the process of eliminating the memory of Kashmiri indigeneity.

Indian settler colonialism is, thus, driven by a desire to silence local perspectives and erase the collective memory of violent dispossession, intensifying the attempt to systematically erase Kashmiri Muslim histories and their indigenous identity. These efforts, historically perpetuated both by India's secular narratives and by Hindutva nationalist narratives surrounding Kashmir, have been implemented through a severe crackdown on Kashmiri media and its journalists, perpetrating a direct assault on the vital institution of free press in the region. This assault and attempted erasure of local narrative have been extended to social media where Kashmiri

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Muslim voices have been censored and de-platformed (see Al Jazeera, 2021). As this article will demonstrate, this attack on Kashmir's press, its journalists and the population in general has also enabled the Indian state to create and control narratives about Kashmiri land dispossession through an indigenization of Hindu Indianness in Kashmir — to construct a Hindu settler colonial order. These conditions align with Toth's (2016) argument that settler colonialism seeks to portray settlement as a relic of the past, disregarding the ongoing presence of indigenous communities on the land, and obscures the fact that both settlement and indigenous resistance to that settlement are ongoing. Settler colonialism, therefore, unquestionably manifests and functions through the dominant state discourse *by controlling and regulating the media through censorship and surveillance* (Kawatra, 2017).

Facilitating Settler Colonialism: Surveillance as Technique across Contexts

Surveillance has been deployed in various locations as a mechanism of settler colonialism. In the context of the settler colonial occupation of Palestine, surveillance has been described by Helga Tawil-Souri as a means to 'buttress dominant relations of state power and control' (2017: 57). Thus, surveillance 'cannot be divorced from the context of when, where, and by whom it is used' (ibid.). For example, Tawil-Souri argues that 'surveillance cannot be separated from Zionist strategies to create different categories of people and places, which have ultimately served to dispossess and control Palestinians' (ibid.: 57–58). Surveillance and security discourses play a pivotal role in the assimilation of Palestinians into the settler regime by fundamentally reshaping their subjectivity (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2017). This concerted process also serves to limit the preservation of Palestinian history, memory and narrative, effectively allowing Israel to supplant the Palestinian presence with its own dominant narrative and values. By employing surveillance and security mechanisms, the Israeli regime actively seeks to redefine the collective identity of Palestinians, eroding their distinct cultural and historical heritage while promoting its own version of events (ibid.). Such mechanisms[7] are now employed in Kashmir as well, raising concerns that India is seeking to extend Israeli-style domination and surveillance tactic in the Valley.

7. For instance, the state authorities have introduced digital family ID — an eight-digit code assigned to each household — with the purported aim of enhancing access to essential social welfare benefits (Firdous and Chandran, 2023). In addition, shopkeepers and locals have been forced to install CCTV cameras across the region to enhance surveillance (Bukhari, 2022). Over two dozen people from Kashmir were targets of surveillance through the Israeli Pegasus spyware between 2017 and mid-2019 (*The Indian Express*, 2021)

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In the Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Chinese state uses surveillance technologies to monitor dissent and exert control over key aspects of Uyghur identity, including Islamic practices. It imposes invasive surveillance measures and psychological pressure on locals to coerce them into relinquishing their native language, religious beliefs and cultural practices (Clarke, 2021). Similar to the situation in Xinjiang, where Beijing justifies stringent actions like surveillance and re-education camps under the pretext of combating terrorism, the context of Kashmir also demonstrates a convergence between the purported welfare of the locals and the eradication of 'criminal/dissenting' elements and cultural aspects deemed undesirable within the framework of settler colonialism. For instance, a hijab ban is administered on students (Majid, 2023); Kashmiri children are forced to chant Hindu hymns at school (Kumar, 2022) or made to take part in Hindu festivities, while celebration of Muslim festivals is disallowed (Mushtaq, 2007). In both regions, this alignment between the interests of the governing powers and the elimination of elements of cultural identity that are perceived as flawed remain central to the overall settler colonial agenda (ANI, 2023; Ganjapure, 2023).

Surveillance has formed the backbone of the intersecting practices of occupation, colonialism and settler colonial logics in Kashmir since 1947. Indian journalist Praveen Swami, known for his close ties with Indian spy agencies (see Donthi, 2019), notes that the Indian Military Intelligence Directorate had been surveilling political formations in Kashmir as early as 1947 to counter what he terms Pakistan's covert war in the state (Swami, 2007: 19). Over decades, the Indian state's surveillance operation has become a multi-layered structure. Surveillance is an integral part of the structure of military occupation, engaging in censorship and propaganda and instilling fear. Alongside the physical presence of over 700,000 Indian troops and other state law-enforcement agencies, the Indian state's surveillance infrastructure involves various state agencies such as the Criminal Investigations Department,[8] Counter Intelligence Kashmir and the State Investigation Agency, which are all part of the state police; the Intelligence Bureau, India's domestic internal security and counter-intelligence agency; and the Indian Army's Military Intelligence. This general description of the infrastructure of surveillance provides the context for the operation of state surveillance under conditions of settler colonial occupation in Kashmir. However, Kashmiri dispossession of land and the maintenance of this dispossession through surveillance pre-dates Indian colonialism of Kashmir. To understand this relationship between surveillance and land, we turn to the British sale of the region in 1846.

8. For the Jammu & Kashmir police organizational structure, see JK Police (n.d.); see also *Deccan Chronicle* (2021)

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Land, Surveillance and 'The Native': The Feudal Context

Hindu Dogra rule began in Kashmir after the British East India Company granted territorial quasi dominion[9] over the Valley to Dogra chieftain Gulab Singh, following the Treaty of Amritsar in March 1846. After purchasing Kashmir, Gulab Singh declared himself the absolute owner of the land, invalidating all proprietary land rights of the inhabitants (Wani, 2018: 318). This claim to be the sole owner was arguably the first land grab in Kashmir, subsequently formalized through new regulations. State control over access to land was firmly maintained by drawing on long-standing feudal practices, including instituting an elaborate administrative surveillance through land records. This surveillance enabled 'rack-renting' and revenue extraction and gave Hindus control over the dispossession of tillers. These systems, instituted largely along lines of religious affiliation, ensured the formation of a Hindu political and administrative class (with exclusive rights and limited ownership over land), while Muslims were restricted to the peasant and artisanal classes (with no rights or control over land) (Hussain, 2020; Rai, 2004).

When Gulab Singh's son Ranbir Singh took over as the new king of the princely state in 1856, the administrative structure mainly comprised three divisions: administrative (civil), revenue and military. The State was divided into five districts each headed by a *wazir-i-wazarat* or district commissioner, and these districts were split into 15 subdistricts or tehsils headed by *tehsildars*, who had one or two *naib-tehsildars* (deputies) under them. All these positions were effectively held by Pandits (Hindus). The wazirs were subordinate to the *hakim-i-ala* or Governor, and his revenue establishment (known as the *daftar-i-diwani*) was composed entirely of Pandits (Bamzai, 1962: 632; Lawrence, 1895). As we will see later, this religious differentiation in land administration has implications for the current settler colonial activity of the ethno-nationalist Hindu practices of the Indian state in Kashmir.

The revenue extraction administration infrastructure was intricate. Kashmir's farmlands were divided among *kardars*, revenue officers or state land agents with extensive authority, who were responsible for obtaining a considerable quantity of crops for the state (Bamzai, 1962). At the village level, the *patwari*, or accountant, oversaw and kept track of revenue. A *lambardar*, or village head, oversaw collection of the produce, while a *shaqdar*[10] was given the task of prohibiting crop harvesting without payment of taxes (Dhar, 1989: 123; Zutshi, 2004: 79). The majority of these mid-rung revenue officials, with the exception of some lambardars, were Hindus.

Dhar (1989) discusses the routes to dispossession employed by these administrative officials. The tehsildar wielded significant powers to force

9. Dogra rule was not one of absolute sovereignty over the State since it was subject to the appointment of British Residents to supervise the functioning of Dogra administration (Bamzai, 1962: 607) .

10. British Settlement officer A. Wingate (1888) referred to shaqdars as 'state-watchers'.

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cultivators to settle arrears. If a cultivator failed to pay the rent or revenue, he would abandon the land to evade the revenue officer's wrath. This gave the tehsildar the opportunity to either take the land or assist land grabbers in manipulating the land registration in exchange for large kickbacks. The patwari allegedly kept various versions of land records, enabling him and his clients to engage in corrupt practices. The patwari often joined the lambardar in the falsification of revenue accounts of the cultivators in return for huge bribes (Dhar, 1989: 124). A. Wingate, the first British Settlement Officer in Kashmir, also highlighted how the intermediary landholders and revenue officials created a nexus of corrupt practices to manipulate the land deeds in their favour and claim ownership by ousting the cultivators from their lands (Wingate, 1888: 34). Thus, the Dogra administration had woven a web of lower-level bureaucratic officials, mostly meagrely paid Hindus, who extracted heavy rents for the state and for themselves from the cultivators, who were mostly Muslims.[11] These officials conducted active monitoring (surveillance) of the cultivators and the crops and were instrumental in physical dispossession of tillers, often in collusion with each other or with landholders. These systems of surveillance were effectively systems of extraction and dispossession of cultivators.

While the existing land administration system exploited and dispossessed a Kashmiri Muslim peasantry, 1927 saw the enactment of the State Subject Law,[12] which established the category of a native Kashmiri. This was not intended so much to categorize Kashmiris as native, but rather to hinder the migration of Punjabi Muslims into the state. The Pandits, resentful of these Muslim migrants, had been campaigning against the entry of foreign public officials into the Dogra administration and had advocated for the definition of a state subject, which would effectively benefit Hindus in gaining employment as well as property rights (Chandel, 2019). The State Subject Law, therefore, produced the native, and has been historically significant in maintaining the demographic composition of the state even as it initially benefited only the Kashmiri Pandits. The State Subject Law was incorporated into the Constitution of India as Article 35A in 1954; in this incarnation, it protected access to land and jobs for Kashmiri Muslims as well as Hindus and other Kashmiri minorities. This historical context forms the backdrop for the current dissolution of Article 35A, the effect of which has been to dispossess Kashmiri Muslims, in particular.

This broader historical context shows how the Dogra feudal conquest instituted intricate administrative systems, used surveillance for the purpose

11. Bamzai (1962: 633) remarks that both patwaris and tehsildars were paid low wages and took advantage of the opportunities for corruption presented by the dysfunctional revenue system.
12. The term 'Hereditary State Subject' was substituted for 'State Subject' by 'Notification 1-L/847' dated 20 April 1927. The notification clearly defined the term 'State Subject' in three classes. For a description of the Classes eligible for subjecthood, see Chandel (2019).

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of dispossession, and rendered most Kashmiri Muslim cultivators landless. It also illuminates how the definition of a 'native' was initially demarcated to maintain the control of the Hindu minority over the region's lands. We now turn to the 'land-to-tiller' reform phase to explore how India's settler colonial project now exploits even this reform phase to legitimate its land grab for a Hindu Indian state.

Land-to-Tiller Reforms and Elite (Bureaucratic) Capture

Known colloquially as the 'Land to Tiller' Act, the Big Landed Estate Act (1950) was heralded as one of the most significant land reforms following Kashmir's 1947 'contested conditional accession' (Lamb, 1991; Noorani, 2011) to the Indian nation state by the newly formed National Conference Government led by Sheikh Abdullah. The Act limited land ownership to a maximum of 22.75 acres per household and transferred lands to tillers; it was lauded as a milestone decision that improved the fate of the Valley's impoverished and disempowered Muslim peasants (Aslam, 1977). While this was a significant achievement, it is important to note that the continuation of the same centralized bureaucratic systems of surveillance and dispossession that were implemented during Dogra rule hampered the land reforms and, in effect, allowed for an elite land capture. Thus, the significant act of returning land to Kashmiris was marred by fraud and misappropriation since the same coercive bureaucratic class was entrusted with executing the agrarian reform.

American agrarian historian and economist Daniel Thorner, who travelled to the State in 1953, questioned the execution and impact of agrarian reform, stating that because 'the old bureaucracy' was entrusted with redistributing land, the land reforms essentially became 'a triumph for corruption and favouritism' (Thorner, 1953: 1001). According to Thorner, 'the same *tehsildars*, deputed as officers on special duty, had performed the actual work of redistribution of land. It had not been done by the peasants themselves. There were no peasant committees set up, as envisaged in the "New Kashmir" Manifesto drawn up by the National Conference as a statement of social and economic goals in 1944' (ibid.). Bamzai (1962) examined how the envisioned objective of land reform was effectively sabotaged by the then Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah, who announced the framework of the plan from a public platform without developing a formal plan or adopting any legislation. When it became clear that the landlords had to cede their estates, there was a rush among influential landowners for the soon-to-be-expropriated land. In this process, the patwaris began negotiating the mechanism of splitting land with tenants and other villagers. When the law was finally implemented, it was apparent that most of the allocated land had already been given to what Bamzai calls 'undeserving individuals'; in many situations, a tenant who shared in the distribution

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of his landlord's excess land was the holder of a vastly larger territory (Bamzai, 1962: 717). Additionally, since the legislation exempted orchards from expropriation, it was possible for large landowners to avoid the ceiling on land quotas by switching from crop cultivation to orchard cultivation. As a result, many bureaucratic classes of the Dogra era continued to possess large swathes of estates (Wani, 2018).[13]

Following these irregularities, the State passed the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act of 1972 (amended in 1976), which provided for the transfer of land ownership rights to tillers and lowered the land ceiling to 12.5 acres per individual (Prasad, 2014). However, even these fresh reforms were not enough to tackle the issue of elite land capture, as Sheikh Abdullah — on his return to power in 1975 — watered down the new legislation to appease what Dhar terms the *kulak* lobby[14] in villages (Dhar, 1989: 260). The reform ultimately concentrated more land in the hands of the richer and more powerful peasantry and established kulaks in villages. Dhar highlights the electoral aspect of this corruption. For example, when Sheikh Abdullah returned to power as the State Chief Minister, far from cracking down on the kulak lobby in villages, he gave them concessions in exchange for their support in elections (Dhar, 1989: 261). As the political elites and bureaucrats, in collusion with the lower-level revenue officials, particularly the tehsildars and patwari, usurped more lands over the years, they also effectively defrauded villagers and peasant farmers of their legitimate ownership of their property (ibid.).

This elite land capture is not surprising: there is often a clear link between land monopoly and political power, as documented in the land reform literature (Borras, 2007). The distribution of resources (including land) and political power is often strongly concentrated in the hands of the landed elite, as it has been in Kashmir; as Borras (ibid.: 287) explains, regions with a significant agrarian sector usually have a state that is substantially influenced by land-owning elites and their allies. However, this era of elite land capture is now being used as a justification for India's settler colonial land legislation. For example, there have been claims that the 2001 Roshini ordinance, enacted during the reign of Farooq Abdullah, then Chief Minister of the Jammu and Kashmir government, enables corruption by allowing people who had encroached on state-owned land to purchase ownership rights at low prices; it is being read as an effort by the State's ruling elites to

13. Another provision allowing for dispossession was introduced in the Big Landed Estate Act. This provided for the confiscation of property of 'enemy agents', defined as persons who had expressed a desire for Kashmir to join Pakistan (Korbel, 1954).
14. In Russian and Soviet history, a kulak was a wealthy or affluent peasant who owned a relatively big farm and several head of cattle and horses, and who was financially capable of employing hired labour and leasing land. The kulaks were prominent characters in rural communities prior to the 1917 Russian Revolution. They routinely lent money, gave mortgages, and were active in the social and administrative activities of the communities (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016).

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legitimize land grabs and illegal transactions (Malik, 2020). Such claims have not resulted, as one might have imagined, in a crackdown on corruption. Rather, since August 2019, the Indian state has enacted the biggest reversals in land legislation, formalizing a system of settler colonial land capture. This settler colonial land capture from mostly Kashmiri peasants has been accompanied by the narrative (Javeed, 2021; Thaploo, 2020) of Hindu reclamation of land from a corrupt Kashmiri Muslim elite, and has been weaponized to initiate a campaign of forceful eviction of Muslim locals from their lands. It is to this form of land dispossession that we turn in the next section.

Settler Colonial Land Capture as Hindu Indian Land Reclamation

In October 2020, after the August 2019 annexation, the Hindutva Indian government issued two further notifications — the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of Central Laws) Third Order and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Fifth Order, 2020 — that repealed 12 acts and amended 14 laws related to land in the erstwhile autonomous State. The State laws that were repealed included the Big Land Estate Abolition Act, 1950, the Jammu and Kashmir Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1956, the Jammu and Kashmir Land Grants Act, 1960, and the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act, 1976 (Sinha, 2020). These amendments removed restrictions on the sale of land and the amount of land that could be bought; land designated for solely agricultural purposes could be converted into land leasable for development projects (Ashiq, 2021). These notifications can be deemed settler colonial acts since these rulings effectively removed protection on lands for the locals and opened them to (Indian) settlers.

Soon after the de-operationalization of Article 370, the Indian government issued a gazette notification redefining the domicile rules for Kashmir and made it easier for non-Kashmiris to obtain permanent residency and jobs in the region which were otherwise protected by Article 35A (Singh, 2020a). In August 2020, the State government issued a report, 'Jammu and Kashmir Marching to a New Era', which listed the issuance of 41.05 lakh (4.1 million) domicile certificates to Indians as one of the Indian government's achievements (Zargar, 2021). Although it remains unclear how many of these domicile rights were granted to outsiders, the lack of transparency only adds to the suspicion among locals that such an exercise is aimed at disenfranchising them further. Such a fear becomes pertinent given that India's election commission then granted voting rights to outsiders, adding up to 2.5 million new voters, able to vote in the local and State body polls (Ganai, 2022). With Indian citizens now able to obtain the right to work, own land and participate in local elections within the disputed region of Kashmir, Veracini (2022) argues that such political arrangements mirror

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the isopolitical interstate associations that are particularly pertinent to the understanding of settler colonial phenomena. He adds that demography itself has become an explicit battlefield, with the focus on manipulating demographic compositions in the process of eliminating the native (particularly the Kashmiri Muslim).

In December 2021, the Indian government held a real estate summit with the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The summit launched a real estate portal and memorandums of agreement with India's National Real Estate Development Council. The objective of the summit and the subsequent initiatives was to encourage rich Indians to buy real estate for second or summer homes in Jammu and Kashmir (Ashiq, 2021). After the summit, state officials met with major realtors in Dubai and drafted Memorandums of Understanding with UAE's Emaar Group and Lulu International estate developers. In March 2023, Emaar unveiled its plans to build a US$ 60 million shopping mall and an office complex in the Kashmiri capital, Srinagar, becoming the first foreign company to invest in the region in decades (Ahmed, 2023). Additionally, Indian multinational conglomerate JSW Group acquired about 9 acres of land to build a steel plant in south Kashmir (Ashiq, 2023). Recently, India's Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Indian Parliament that as many as 185 Indian settlers had bought land in the State, while 1,559 Indian companies, including multinational companies, had begun making investments in the contested region (Press Trust of India, 2023). The Indian state has already designated an area of more than 625 acres in Kashmir as special land banks for industrial and commercial purposes (Ashiq, 2023)

Indian settler colonialism also proceeds by dispossessing Kashmiri Muslims and setting up colonies for Kashmir Hindu Pandits, thus demonstrating the religion-based character of Indian settler colonialism. The Jammu and Kashmir State government had already amended the Jammu and Kashmir Migrant Immovable Property (Preservation, Protection and Restraint on Distress Sales) Act, 1997, to enable Kashmiri Pandits to 'reclaim' property sold under duress following their migration in the early 1990s (*Hindustan Times*, 2021). The State gave district magistrates powers to preserve and protect such properties and made them the legal custodians of such immovable assets (*The Hindu*, 2022). Thus, protections for the land rights of Kashmiri Pandits had already been strengthened: post 2019, Kashmiri Muslim land dispossession has been enabled while Kashmir Pandit land and housing rights continue to be protected through the setting up of separate colonies.[15]

15. For example, the government also authorized the transfer of 2,318 *kanal* (289.75 acres) in seven villages across 17 districts in Srinagar and Budgam to the Housing and Urban Development Department for the development of 'free of cost' housing colonies especially for Kashmiri Pandits (Ashiq, 2022). Additional housing earmarked for Pandit officials continues to be constructed and allocated (Lone, 2023).

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Right-wing Kashmiri Pandit organizations, especially, welcomed the decision of the Indian government to revoke Article 370, as it would pave the way for their dream of a separate homeland exclusively for Hindus within the Valley (Ghose, 2019). In an initiative akin to the Israeli model of separate roads, walled cities and restricted access to 'outsiders', Panun Kashmir, a right-wing Kashmir Pandit collective, had introduced the 'Homeland Resolution' at its December 1991 convention,[16] demanding the creation of a separate homeland with Union Territory status for Kashmiri Hindus within Kashmir, encompassing the parts of the Valley to the east and north of the river Jhelum.[17]

However, beyond the discourse of Kashmiri Pandit reclamation of land lost, what becomes apparent in the Indian settler colonial narrative is the idea of *the reclamation of land for the Hindu Indian state*. This discourse can be discerned, for example, through government statements in Indian media narratives. On 12 January 2022, *The Print* reported that R.R. Bhatnagar, advisor to the LG of Jammu and Kashmir, stated that '60,000 acres of encroached land has been retrieved in Jammu and Kashmir' (*The Print*, 2022). Assessing the performance of the land revenue systems in place, Bhatnagar also announced the surveillance that was to accompany this so-called reclamation of land from encroachers; he 'directed the Revenue department to create a dashboard for continuous and effective monitoring of removal of encroachments on government land' (ibid.).

Accompanying this process there is supposed to be a 'digitisation of land records', an 'expunging of illegal entries', and a reconstruction of 'missing records afresh' (ibid.). The Jammu and Kashmir revenue department has claimed that land digitization is already in progress in about 20 districts, but the initiative has raised concerns among landowners regarding the presence of inaccurate entries made during the previous settlement that took place more than a decade ago (Bhat, 2022). According to a report by Legal Forum for Kashmir (LFK, 2023), the state uses revenue officials to gather comprehensive information about land, and these data are then utilized to reassess existing laws and designate lands for projects, including the construction of military installations, the establishment of exclusive Hindu settlements, the development of rail and road networks, industrial corridors, and more (Stand with Kashmir, 2023). Through this mechanism, the state forcibly displaces local landholders, depriving them of any legal recourse, with the result that the state can engage in extensive land expropriation with complete impunity. The LFK report highlighted that a staggering 178,005.213 acres of land in the Kashmir region, along with 25,159.56 acres in Jammu, have been earmarked for such land seizures by the Indian state.

16. For the resolution, see KNN (2002).
17. See Dutta (2023) for a discussion of the different political affiliations of Kashmiri Pandits often stratified by class and wealth. See Duschinksi (2018) for a discussion of Panun Kashmir.

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The fears of local landowners that land digitization and geo-referencing will enable government surveillance have already been on display during the widespread demonstrations against the recent 'illegal land encroachment' eviction drive in the State (Iqbal, 2023). Under the pretext of combating land encroachment, the state authorities also launched a forceful eviction campaign, and by January 2023, the revenue administration asserted that they had reclaimed about 50,000 acres of State and *kacharai* (grazing) land throughout the territory (Chakraborty, 2023). In the context of a military occupation, the purpose of surveillance is therefore to dispossess individuals of their land through the encroachment narrative and to label Kashmiri Muslim land ownership illegal through the reconstruction of digital land records. Far from the supposed transparency and accountability promised by the digitization of land records, the process suggests expunging records of native Kashmiri Muslim land ownership.

Although the Indian state is vigorously reshaping the discourse on the repeal of Article 370, locals in Kashmir evidently see the changes as part of a process to remove all legal and administrative impediments for non-natives to acquire land and alter the Valley's social and cultural demography. The assessment of a local Kashmir interviewee was quite astute: 'They did it because they want to implement the Hindutva agenda because we are Muslim majority State which they don't like. They would alter [the] character of the society — the Muslim character of the society'.[18] Another respondent expressed a similar opinion: 'It's the beginning of that violent chapter [demographic change] … India has lifted that veil and now they're going to pounce on us, take land from us and do many more brutal things. People are basically worried about their resources, land and property'.[19]

This represents a local testimony of Kashmiri experiences of land dispossession. It is perhaps to silence such testimony that the Indian state has been attempting to deprive Kashmiris of their own narratives. We now turn to an examination of how the Indian state has been engaging in this narrative dispossession.

Narrative Dispossession or Settler Colonial Erasure

Settler colonial logic in Kashmir not only entails land dispossession and the attempted elimination of the native, but also seeks an erasure of Kashmiri memories and their narrative of dispossession, along with the creation of an alternative reality or facts on the ground. To illustrate how Indian settler colonial activity attempts to reshape the narrative of land dispossession as land reclamation, we briefly examine the ways in which the Indian state targets Kashmir's local media and journalists. While human and

18. Interview, local, Kupwara, 9 March 2022.
19. Interview, farmer, Srinagar, 21 March 2022.

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technological surveillance in relation to media has a long history in Kashmir and has been deployed as a form of control (Jamwal, 2014), here we focus on the escalation, post-August 2019, of forms of surveillance and punishment deployed specifically to reshape and control narratives, to the point of annihilating any flow of communication regarding Kashmir that would contest the Indian state's narratives on land. Going further, the settler colonial aim appears to be the creation of alternative memories, an alternative reality of Kashmiri experience of the annexation and land dispossession, and the creation of 'facts' regarding the *reclamation* of a Hindu Indian Kashmir.

Controlling the narrative became key for the Indian government as it implemented a blanket communication lockdown on 4 August 2019. This lockdown was designed to block Kashmiri media reporting from the ground — reporting that could reach Indian and international media — regarding Kashmiri dissent, rage and frustration at the removal of any vestiges of sovereignty over land. In short, the physical and digital sieges were specifically designed as part of a settler colonial logic to eliminate Kashmiri media stories about Kashmiri protests against the annexation. Immediately before and after 5 August, founders, editors and journalists of Kashmiri press — including Qazi Shibli (*The Kashmiriyat*) who had reported on troop movements just before 5 August, Irfan Malik (*Greater Kashmir*), M.T. Rasool (*Rising Kashmir*) and Sheikh Saleem (*Kashmir Convenor*) — were arrested (Majumdar, 2019). This was an escalation of the journalist arrests and the blatant attacks on Kashmir's local press which had been on the rise since 2016. After August 2019, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported 'a climate of fear among journalists', including rumours of 32 names of journalists on an arrest list (ibid.). *Greater Kashmir*'s editor-in-chief and owner had been summoned by the India National Investigative Agency for questioning about its source of funding prior to 5 August, and according to the CPJ's review of that newspaper's content, not a single story about the annexation was published between 6 August and 1 September 2019 (ibid.).

A policy of surveillance and punishment has been key to the Indian government's control of media narratives. After August 2019, the cyber police wing of the Jammu and Kashmir police was expanded, ostensibly to tackle cybercrime, but in reality to target journalists for any reporting from the ground that did not align with governmental narratives (Hassan, 2020). Housed in Cargo,[20] the primary purpose of the cyber wing appears to be the dual role of surveillance and punishment. A report in *Article 14* claimed that approximately 300 social media users had been summoned to the cyber police unit, accused of 'cyberbullying', because they had expressed dissenting views on the annexation of Kashmir (Javeed, 2020). Using the label of 'cyberbullying', criminal cases have been filed against social media users

20. Cargo is an interrogation centre of the joint forces (Special Operations Group of the State police and Indian army) and is used as a torture house. See: www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2012/0711/In-Kashmir-old-torture-centers-get-makeover

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and journalists under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) — India's anti-terror law (ibid.). In December 2020, *The Intercept* reported that 'much of the cyber unit's internal operations remain shrouded in secrecy, its actions have had a noticeable chilling effect on social media activity in Kashmir. Many accounts have vanished, while others have gone silent or no longer post political content' (Hassan, 2020).

Coupled with the establishment of the cyber police wing, in June 2020 the Department of Information and Public Relations issued a media policy on Kashmir.[21] Apart from its formalization of the practice of surveillance and punishment, the policy is also explicit about its intention to reshape a positive discourse about Kashmir. As the media policy states, 'the broad objective of the Media Policy is to ensure a synchronized and effective use of all forms of media to build public trust, foster a genuinely positive image of the Government based on performance and strengthen relationship with key stakeholders' (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2020). Thus, the policy has been instituted so that the Indian state can control both social media expression and local journalism which could report on facts from Kashmir.

This policy has indeed had a 'chilling effect' on news media in Kashmir. In our interviews with journalists, one significant and recurring theme was the inability to report on local stories, with the result that local stories were in danger of disappearing. Journalist H commented that local newspapers had been 'at the forefront' of reporting the 'ground situation'.[22] According to this journalist: 'what is happening is all these local newspapers have become an extension of a public relations department of the state. They only cover stories which come from the government's PR department'.[23] The mainstream Kashmir newspapers only want 'positive stories like, for example, a district magistrate has inaugurated an ATM' or 'a district magistrate has come out with the policy even if the policy is in its infancy'.[24] Journalist A corroborated this state of affairs: 'If we see the copy of a newspaper in 2016 and 2020 or post-August 5, it will look like these are two different newspapers because one would carry ground reports — diverse ground reports — and [the] second is filled with either advertisements or

21. The media policy stipulates that 'there shall be no release of advertisements to any media which incite or tend to incite violence, question sovereignty and integrity of India or violate the accepted norms of public decency and behaviour' (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2020: 8). The threats contained in the policy include financial loss, de-empanelment, or deselection by the government for licence, as well as sharing of information with 'security agencies' about the media house and/or specific journalists. The policy indicates that the 'intent to threaten the unity, integrity, security, or sovereignty of India' would be deemed cyberterrorism, and cyberterrorism is punishable by imprisonment, potentially for life.
22. Interview, Journalist H, Srinagar, 6 September 2021.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.

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something which is irrelevant to Kashmir — how to make pickles and all that'.[25]

An examination of stories on land dispossession in major print news media in Kashmir reveals the Indian state's narrative about its settler colonial land dispossession. On 27 October 2020, *Greater Kashmir* had a very short story, just three two-line paragraphs, describing this major land legislation. 'Anyone can buy land now in Jammu and Kashmir', says the first line, 'as the Government of India has notified laws' (*Greater Kashmir*, 2020). On 9 November, *Rising Kashmir* had a more detailed story citing condemnations by the Gupkar alliance, or former Kashmiri ruling parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and National Conference, to balance the quotes by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. But there was not much more by way of analysis (*Rising Kashmir*, 2020). These stories appeared to echo Indian media reports of how Indians could buy land in Kashmir, with headlines such as 'All you need to know about buying property in Jammu and Kashmir' in the *Economic Times* (Sharma, 2019), and 'Thinking of buying property in Jammu and Kashmir? Here are 6 things to know' in *Money Control* (Sharma and Ramnanai, 2020).

Most insidious is the creation of the Indian state's narrative that land dispossession is in fact land reclamation from Kashmiri encroachers. On 1 June 2022, *Rising Kashmir* reported on an 'anti-encroachment drive' whereby '13 *kanals* with a market value in excess of Rs 25 crores had been transferred as part of Roshni scheme' to the State (*Rising Kashmir*, 2022). The tehsildar was quoted as saying 'the land is free of encumbrances' (ibid.). The article ended with an appeal to the public to surrender land to the authorities voluntarily as if the State were reclaiming the land from Kashmiri encroachers (ibid.). These examples from the print media are indicative of the ways in which the major Kashmiri news media fail to report on ordinary Kashmiri experiences and perspectives of this dispossession, but rather echo the settler colonial governmental narrative of encroachment. Using quotes from officials rather than from people who experience dispossession gives an impression that the post-August 2019 land notices are beneficial. Thus, the media stories about land and dispossession demonstrate the disappearance of any overt dissent or political challenge to the Indian government's settler colonial project in Kashmir.

At the same time, it is important to note that some independent Kashmiri digital media and freelance journalists who work for publications outside Kashmir continue their struggle to report from the ground. Journalist I, for example, states that although 'the local media has been forced into silence' and 'there's no reflection of … whatever is happening on the ground, what the people say [regarding] land laws … all those things are being reported by international media only or independent journalists who work for

25. Interview, Journalist A, Srinagar, 10 March 2022.

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national [i.e., Indian] or international media organizations'.[26] While most major Indian news media put out explainers about what the new land laws meant (see Singh, 2020b), Kashmiri journalist Safwat Zargar, a special correspondent for the Indian digital outlet, *Scroll.in*, gave a detailed analysis from a Kashmiri perspective. The subheading reads: 'Kashmiris see this as a double assault: on history as well as the future' (Zargar, 2020). In addition to outlining the raft of changes to provisions for real estate laws, industrial development, agricultural land and strategic areas, Zargar explains how, for example, public rights to commons were implemented in previous land acts legislated through Naya Kashmir policies. Mudasir Ahmad's piece in *The Wire* discusses the factual inaccuracies of a government spokesperson who omitted to mention the sweeping powers of the government to approve conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land, and to 'declare any area as "strategic" for use by the armed forces, take over any land for "industrial use" or "public use" or "any other use"' (Ahmad, 2020). Writing for Al Jazeera, Rifat Fareed cites the assessment of Khurram Parvez, the globally renowned defender of human rights,[27] that the '"real reason" behind the abrogation of Article 370 was "land grab and demographic changes"' (Fareed, 2020). These explanations and analyses emphasize the dispossession of Kashmiris. Journalist I highlighted this aspect of Kashmiri resistance: '[the] Indian state feels that control in narrative is important, but they at no point of time … have been able to hold narrative on Kashmir. It has always been with the people of Kashmir, the narrative that has been emanating from the ground'.[28] The price for continuing to disseminate stories from the ground is high, given the Indian government's surveillance in the context of its ongoing settler colonialism. Kashmir's independent media outlets and journalists, especially freelance journalists, who try to tell stories from the ground face severe threats, intimidation and even detention.[29]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Attention to the historical relationship between land, surveillance and Hindu relations of power sheds light on the mechanisms of Indian settler colonialism and its distinct form in Kashmir. The purpose of this settler colonialism through the mechanism of surveillance is to dispossess Kashmiri Muslims,

26. Interview, Journalist I, Srinagar, 27 October 2021.
27. Khurram Parvez leads the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society and has been under police detention since November 2021, illustrating the Indian government's criminalization of human rights. See the FreeKhurramCampaign webpage for information as well as updates: https://freekhurram.wordpress.com/
28. Interview, Journalist I, Srinagar, 27 October 2021.
29. At the time of writing, Kashmiri journalists including Irfan Mehraj, Sajad Gul Aasif Sultan and Fahad Shah, for example, remain in detention. See Committee to Protect Journalists (2023).

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in particular, of their land whilst producing a narrative of land being reclaimed for a Hindu Indian state and for Indian settlers. Furthermore, this land reclamation is reported in local media as a neutral fact, as if it were of benefit to Kashmiris rather than a form of dispossession. The audience for these narratives is not Kashmiris themselves, who know only too well that the positive land distribution that they experienced in the second half of the 20th century, albeit flawed and vulnerable to corruption, has been dramatically reversed. To this purpose, the powers of the Indian state to surveille, discipline and punish are directed against local Kashmiri media in order to obscure the facts on the ground. In an era where local Kashmiri stories have the potential to reach a transnational audience instantaneously, the settler colonial project undertakes the simultaneous strategies of land dispossession and narrative dispossession. In so doing, the Indian state attempts to engage in a settler colonial practice of epistemic/discursive erasure to ensure that the Kashmiri Muslim native does not occupy the position of indigeneity in relation to land or even in relation to the narrative of a dispossessing land grab. Rather, Kashmiri Muslims are represented as encroachers on their own land.

The encroachment narrative arguably forms part of a narrative arc that began with the Dogra dispensation usurping Kashmir's land as feudal property, instituting administrative systems and legislation to protect Dogra interests and those of co-religionist Pandit 'natives'. Native Kashmiri Muslim subjects were rendered landless in that feudal system. Mridu Rai (2018) has argued that Dogras and Pandits invoked the principle of 'first peoples' as the basis on which Kashmir was re-imagined as 'originally' Hindu before the 1933 Glancy Commission, which was formed to examine discrimination against Kashmiri Muslims. It is this principle, we would argue, that forms the basis of the Indian settler colonial state's narrative of the reclamation and indigenization of Kashmiri lands as Hindu Indian land. In this imaginary, Kashmiri Muslims are rendered encroachers. In this narrative, almost 100 years after the Glancy Commission, the process of removing legal safeguards around Kashmiri rights to own land, and opening the domicile status of Kashmir to Indians, expands Hindu rights to 'reclaim' Kashmir from the Muslim encroacher.

In this sense, an examination of settler colonial activity in Kashmir illustrates Wolfe's (2006) thesis that it is the function of the settler state to erect new communities on the stolen land by attempting to eliminate the native from those territories (Wolfe, 2006: 388). The settler state also actively strives to (re)produce indigeneity by ensuring free mobility for the settler while regulating or rejecting altogether the mobility of the native (Carpio et al., 2022). It is interesting to note that the category of 'Indigenous' continues to be used to describe native peoples in other settler colonial contexts such as Australia or the USA, even as there is an attempted elimination of the native through assimilatory practices (Wolfe, 2006). In Kashmir, we argue that there is an attempted erasure of Kashmiri Muslims as indigenous to Kashmir through the notion that Indian Hindus are reclaiming land.

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As in the cases of Palestine and Xinjiang, the Indian state's extensive surveillance–military complex not only promotes settler colonialism but also enables control over every aspect of native peoples' lives and property, especially land. These comparative elements may generate future research on the types of settler colonialism. In this essay, we have illuminated the distinct ways in which the Indian settler colonial state operates in Kashmir through its attempts to eliminate the natives and their narratives by representing Kashmir Muslim natives as encroachers on their land.

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